When Arthur Lovejoy published his study of the history of the idea of *The Great Chain of Being* in 1936, he created somewhat of a stir among followers of St. Thomas Aquinas. In his account he presented Aquinas as having tried to hold two different conceptions of the universe as a whole that were irreconcilable with one another, and of thereby leaving us with the “painful spectacle of a great intellect endeavoring by spurious or irrelevant distinctions to evade the consequences of its own principles, only to achieve in the end an express self-contradiction” (GCB 78).

Of course, St. Thomas was no longer there to defend himself. But there were Thomists who came to his defense. Edward Mahoney has drawn up a list of these replies as of 1982 in a footnote to his study of the “Hierarchy of Being According to Some Late-medieval and Renaissance Philosophers”. In brief, Pégis was first to reply in his 1939 Marquette *Aquinas Lecture*, then Veatch several years later in “A Note on the Metaphysical Grounds for Freedom”, and then Pégis once again in two more articles. Most of these contributions were followed by a rejoinder from Lovejoy. The argument could have gone on

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forever, each side armed with its own texts from Aquinas seemingly opposed to one another, the Thomists insisting on the side of freedom in creation and Lovejoy insisting on the side of necessity in the created, without any suggestion of how the two might be reconciled in the idea of a single created universe representing the divine perfection and goodness ad extra through a diversity and multiplicity of forms. The exchange of salvos was stopped by the editors, who had had enough of it and allowed Pégis the last word in a “Postscript” that settled nothing and only re-emphasized a gap in understanding between the two sides.

More recently, after Mahoney’s summation of the earlier debate, I too have offered a reply to Lovejoy in the context of a more complete exposition of Aquinas’ conception of the Perfection of the Universe. Lovejoy was no longer present to offer a rejoinder to that and no one has come forth to take up the side of Lovejoy since then, even though there is a lot to be said for the idea of necessity in the great chain of being that he saw in Aquinas and that Thomists objected to in their response to Lovejoy. It may be that the debate was closed too soon, before the fullness of Aquinas’ thinking on the subject could be brought out, since in fact Aquinas writes a great deal both about necessity in the created universe and about freedom in the act of creating. In their rejoinder to Lovejoy, Pégis and Veatch were too quick to accept on face value the opposition as set up by Lovejoy between the different conceptions of the universe and to uphold one side of the opposition, supposedly the Christian one about freedom, against the other, supposedly the Greek one about necessity. Pégis’ and Veatch’s tactic left Lovejoy free to continue to maintain that the problem with Aquinas lay, not in accepting either one of the conceptions rather than the other, but in trying to hold on to both at the same time. What was not asked was whether Lovejoy’s way of setting up the opposition between the two conceptions was in fact adequate. Could it not be that the voluntary or ‘free’ creationist view of Aquinas required necessity in the universe, and could it not be that the supposedly more rational

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6 Ibid., pp. 291 sqq.